The Builder.

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THE space necessarily occupied in every number of our journal by architectural and decorative illustrations, essays on matters connected with our speciality, and information and opinions on the current topics of the day,—striving, as we do, to give our readers early information of all that occurs within our province,—leaves us sometimes in arrear with our notices of published works. This is the case just now; and we find on the table a whole pile of books, concerning which our readers ought to know something. Amongst them we have from America, where attention to art is rapidly awakening, "Hints on Public Architecture," by Robert Dale Owen,*—a quarto volume, profusely illustrated, containing much interesting matter and many just opinions. It is true these are adopted rather than struck out; moreover, there is a want of arrangement which lessens the value of the work; nevertheless, it cannot fail to have a useful effect in America. It proceeds from a building committee appointed to select plans and erect a structure for the Smithsonian Institution, an important educational foundation in Pennsylvania. Their first intention was simply to give the public information as to the plan and style of architecture selected for the building, but hints in regard to public architecture, and information as to the merit and cost of different manners, having accumulated during their inquiry, they determined on putting the whole into a connected form, and they intrusted the materials to their chairman, Mr. Owen, for that purpose.

The heads of the chapters will give a general notion of the contents of the book. 1, is "Touching some general conditions of excellence in architecture," wherein the writer says justly—"It is among the conditions of a true architecture, that it mould itself to the wants and the domestic habits and the public customs and the political institutions and the religious sentiment of its country and its age; that it assort with the materials at hand, submitting to modifications as new materials present themselves; and that it avail itself, from time to time, of the various aids which mathematical and mechanical and chemical science offer, for its convenience and advancement." 2, "Concerning some conditions of purity in style." 3, "Concerning the two great divisions of manner in architecture,"—that is the "post and lintel architecture, and arch architecture." 4, treats of the "adaptation of post and lintel architecture to modern purposes," and the author deduces that Grecian architecture can never become our architecture,—"seeing that a true architecture should serve, not dictate; should minister to the wants of man, not demand that these wants should be squared and formalised and schooled down, till they conform to the measure of its arbitrary preconceptions."

As to plan, he says, in this same chapter,—"It is strange, that, at this day, it should be necessary to repeat, that, in planning any edifice, public or private, we ought to begin *from within*; that we should first suffer the specific wants and conveniences demanded, to block out its forms, to determine its interior proportions, and decide the connection of its parts,—and then adjust and elaborate its architecture as its appropriate garb; into the skilful fashioning of which there enter, in truth, grace and fair proportions, but yet in such guise, that the garment shall adapt itself to the individual form it is destined to clothe; fitting well, and displaying the peculiarities of that form to the best advantage." 5, is "Of hybrid architecture." 6, "Of arch architecture." In this, acknowledging his preference for Norman and Gothic structures as models, he says,—"But as a servile copy of manners is never happy or pleasing, so is it also in architecture. 'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' If the mere copying, with unquestioning fidelity, of any models, even the best selected, sufficed to impart excellence, reputation in art might be cheaply earned. But there go, to make a true architect, far other qualifications than these: original conception, that can shake itself free of previous canons; independent thought; creative genius. The works of others must be studied, not to believe and repeat, but to probe and anatomize. There must be sought, not the offspring, but the parent; not the mere superficial details, but the hidden principle that gave birth to them. If the effect, in any old example, be good, and the combination happy, it should be the effort of the student to catch and master the spirit whence these sprang. In his hands, perchance, it may produce effects as good, combinations as happy, but stamped with the individuality of his own genius, shaped by the circumstances of country and age and climate in which he designs, and modified, in each case, by the specific purpose or occasion that may chance to call forth the exercise of his talent." 7, treats "Of anachronisms in architecture," which Mr. Owen terminates, by asserting as a principle,—"That an anachronism in architecture may be either a merit, a whim, or an offence: a merit, when the foreign feature introduced is demanded by utility, harmonises with the spirit of the style upon which it is engrafted, adds a new beauty, or corrects an old defect; a whim, when the innovation is a mere fanciful variety, adding nothing of useful, or graceful, or appropriate, beyond what the original details of the style sufficed to supply; and an offence, when the exotic is transplanted into a soil unsuited to its growth,—when the anachronism produces incongruity, not conventional merely, but natural and inherent. To the genius of the architect it must, in each case, be left, to determine the exact line of demarcation between intemperate license and barren servility." 8, is "Relative to the comparative cost of the arch and post and lintel manners," and shows, so far as the data given may be depended on, the great advantage of the arch manner. Chapter 9 is appropriated to a description of the "Smithsonian Institution Building," to which we propose to refer separately hereafter.

The design chosen (out of thirteen submitted), is, strange to say, what is called Norman, but is in reality the round-arch style of the Rhine towns, with such additions and variations as the architect, Mr. James Renwick, Jun., of New York City, thought desirable. It has a frontage of 447 feet, and no less than nine towers of various sizes and heights, the largest being 37 feet square, and the most lofty 145 feet high. The lowest of fourteen tenders was to erect the building in *marble*, "ashlar finish," 229,500 dollars, or in *Seneca freestone* "ashlar finish," which was ultimately selected, 205,250 dollars.

Also from America comes "A Treatise on Landscape Gardening," by A. J. Downing, of which a fourth edition, just now published by Messrs. Longman, is before us.* We should be glad to see architects paying some little attention to landscape gardening: both they and proprietors may take our word for the fact that skill in it does not come by intuition. At the present moment we know scarcely any persons who may pretend to be masters in the art. We have met lately one or two spoilers of God's earth, who take their five guineas a-day, and know no more of what they profess than any of the bevy of bumpkins who, under their direction, are *at this moment* marring charms and obliterating beauties.

Loudon, who did so much for landscape, always recommended those who sought his advice how best to acquire skill in it, to begin by making careful drawings, in some accessible botanic gardens, of all trees and shrubs; then to visit all the villas he could, and make memorandum plans of the general distribution of the grounds and buildings; afterwards to study and sketch natural scenery. During this time the student would of course make himself acquainted with the best published works on the subject; and he need not omit Mr. Downing's book, which prompted this remark. The study of landscape gardening lends additional interest to every country ramble, where we—

"Pluck life's roses in the quiet fields."

and brings a healthful as well as profitable result. To the flagging spirit of the hard worker in towns, the mere mention of *quiet fields* induces a refreshing and soothing vision. Happy those who for a time can realize it!

The second part of the "Transactions of the Society of Arts for 1847-8," is an exceedingly nice volume, illustrated by an large a number of lithographs, coloured and plain, that the cost of it must have been very great,—greater, indeed, than the amount of the subscription would justify, if it were not that no "Transactions" have been issued to the members for some time past.

It contains, amongst others, Mr. Whishaw's paper "On the application of heated currents to manufacturing and other purposes." Mr. Hay's "Suggestions for rendering carved sandstone impervious to the action of the atmosphere" (by the application of bees' wax dissolved in spirits of turpentine,—not a new idea); Mr. Claudet's "Progress of Photography;" Mr. Cundall's paper "On Art as applied to Bookbinding;" Mr. Smith Williams's "Essay on Lithography;" Mr. Hunt's statement of the "Principles upon which the tinted glass used in the palm-house at Kew has been selected;" Mr. Findlay "On lighthouses and beacons;" and Mr. Woodcroft's general view of "Steam navigation."

Nearly all these papers were mentioned by us when brought before the society, so that it will be unnecessary now to refer to them.

As to the glass used in the palm-house, our readers will remember that it has a *green* tinge, and that the object of this is to obstruct the passage of the *scorching* rays, without interfering with any others. At the close of the paper the author suggests the use of glasses differently coloured to produce various effects. He con-

* Published by Putnam, New York and London. 1849.

* "A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, with a view to the improvement of Country Residences; with Remarks on Rural Architecture." By A. J. Downing, author of "Designs for Cottage Residences," &c. London. Longman and Co. 1849

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